

# PEOPLE & THINGS

MUSEUMS rarely inspire affection, but I fancy that many an English heart beats faster, beneath its English woollens, at the memory of a visit to the Musée de l'Impressionisme in Paris. It is sad news, therefore, that this museum is to close for several months in order that indispensable repairs may be carried out to its historic shell.

Pictures, like people, grow more beautiful the more they are admired. Cellars and store-rooms are sad places, at best. I wonder, therefore, if the French Government could not be persuaded to send at any rate a selection of these pictures to London during the period at which the Jeu de Paume will be closed?

The Impressionists are ideal ambassadors; and an exhibition of this kind would bring to London not only the pictures themselves, but the flavour and feel of French life.

## A Malignant Animal

THE stoat is not loved. So rarely, indeed, is tribute paid to its sensibilities that I am happy to pass on the following true story, which relates to that period, just after the war, when the precincts of Wentworth Woodhouse were given over to open-cast mining, and there was distress in many quarters at what was thought to be a violation of country life.

Now, however, that the area in question has been returned to normal use, I hear that, in one respect at least, it has been considerably enriched by the years of disturbance. Partridges had played only a secondary part in the Wentworth Woodhouse shoot; but now they abound. All records were broken in 1952; and even in 1953, an exceptionally bad partridge year, the best bag was only four and a half brace below the top-figure for the previous year.

Lord Fitzwilliam suggests, as a guess, that the chemical fumes which hung over the area during the period in question may have disinfected the partridges' feathers and kept them free from disease. He also tells me, in less controversial vein, that whereas formerly the partridges were constantly attacked by stoats, these animals so disliked the noise and smell of open-easters that, after a show of paws, they voted unanimously for a policy of emigration and have never been seen again.

## South-West Passage

"EVEREST," wrote F. S. Smythe in 1930, "is the only great Himalayan peak which can definitely be said to be accessible to mountaineers. Other great peaks may defy all comers for many generations, and among them I would number Kangchengjunga."

It is on the south-western face, which Smythe considered quite impracticable, that Mr. J. W. R. Kempe's reconnaissance expedition is pinning its hopes this spring. The expedition is lightly equipped, by Everest standards. Its members display, moreover, that extreme modesty of speech and intention which is the mark of the true mountaineer.

When I saw, for instance, Mr. John Tucker on the eve of his departure from Southampton, I

By ATTICUS

could with difficulty persuade him to admit that he was likely to set foot on Kangchengjunga at all. When I quoted Smythe on the "desperately dangerous" character of Kangchengjunga, his ruddy cheeks grew darker and his sturdy scrun-hair's frame contracted with embarrassment. "Don't put that in," he said. "You'll have us laughed out of mountaineering circles."

Nor could I get him to speak of his earlier mountaineering experience, although I knew him to be a friend of Sir John Hunt and a pupil of Alfred Gregory. My questions, he implied, were irrelevant and rather absurd. "There's nothing wrong with shyness," he said. "You can go a long way with it."

The greater part, we shall all hope, of 28,000 feet.

## A Great Singer

THE typical "great singer" of our time is of mingled Polish and Egyptian origin. He bears a Swedish-Italian name, has an American passport, travels with a



Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau

suite of seventeen and cannot read a note of music.

Mr. Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, who sings with Miss Schwarzkopf at the Royal Festival Hall this afternoon, is quite a different sort of person. He does not give interviews; no poker-playing aides bar the way to his door; he has never appeared in a film. In his late twenties, however, he is widely regarded as the best lieder-singer alive; unknown, moreover, to his English admirers, who know him mainly as the peerless interpreter of the "Winterreise" and the "Schöne Müllerin," he has quietly been building for himself a second reputation, as both singer and actor. In such parts as Don Giovanni, Jokanaan in "Salomé," and Wolfram in "Tannhäuser."

## Hereditaries

SINGING, like painting, is often a hereditary affair; but in Mr. Fischer-Dieskau's case there can be no question of this, for his father is Professor of Greek in Berlin and his mother for many years taught English. His voice, though spotted by a perceptive schoolmaster when he was only six years old, was not taken seriously until, at the end of the war, he spent some time in Italy as a prisoner of war.

Inheritance may, however, be

said to play a part in the radiant gravity and psychological discernment of his interpretations—and also in his personal tastes, for he solaces himself on train journeys with Dickens and, like Beethoven, and Weber before him, he has a great liking for Scottish folksongs.

## Maximilian

MR. S. N. BEHRMAN'S life of Mr. Duveen is one of the most delightful of recent books; and it has been savoured, both here and in America, by thousands of readers for whom the tale of a Titian or the authenticity of a Tintoretto would not, in themselves, be of commanding interest.

Mr. Behrman is one of the most elusive of men; but in recent weeks this fugacious American, who has the tongue of a Sydney Smith and the look of a nurturing eagle, has been sighted in London, in Oxford, at Settignano, and in a garden above Rapallo. It is this last which gives the clue to his activities; for he is at work on an extended study of Sir Max Beerbohm; and, whereas for Lord Duveen he had a qualified and ironical admiration, he regards Sir Max with an intensity of feeling which, in a more ingenuous man, might be called idolatrous.

His ear for dialogue which has delighted theatre audiences for two generations could not be better employed than in perpetuating Sir Max's lapidaria.

## Veracity

SIR MAX is, of course, the most accomplished of broadcasters. The recording van is, in fact, one of the few emblems of progress for which he has a favourable word. "Some people resent the microphone," he said to me in 1952, "but I welcome it into my house as a friendly animal."

Mr. Behrman tells me, however, that Sir Max is adamantine in his refusal to appear on television. One American sponsor took the trouble to visit Rapallo, and to assure the reluctant phrase-master that the operation could be carried out with no inconvenience to himself. "We'll bring the apparatus right here," he said, "and all you have to do is to sit in your chair and say, 'Ladies and gentlemen, I'm delighted to be with you.'"

Sir Max looked at him with pell-mell reproach.

"What?" he said. "Would you wish me to start with a lie?"

## Old Masters and New

MY shirtmaker, like myself, is undemonstrative by nature. He has never advertised. His methods and range of materials have not altered, in fact, since Dickens had a regular order and the author of "Carmen" had his neckties sent to Paris by hand.

For such fastidious craftsmen the writing is, alas, on the wall—or rather, on the creamy pages of New York's most sophisticated magazine.

"From the fabulous palette of Raphael," I read last week, "comes the inspiration for —'s new 'Raphael' sports shirt. The colors seem straight from the master himself—mellow clear and gently glowing."

Colour is not all, however: "the texture," we learn as we read on, "recalls that of Raphael's finest oils—soft, yet with a hint of grainy crispness."

Progress is ineluctable: in a year or two we pre-Raphaelites will be as obsolete as halberdiers.